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ABSTRACT

Noting that previous research in the area of relational communication has been concerned primarily with the control defining patterns of symmetry and complementarity, this paper investigates how other dimensions of social relationships might be incorporated with descriptions of the control dimensions. After a review of some conceptualizations and measures of possible dimensions, the paper presents an exploratory model that attempts to interrelate three concepts in ways that encourage other research and more empirically-based theorizing. Specifically, it suggests that transactional control and affection dimensions can be used to discriminate between functional and dysfunctional families. (FL)

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RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING:
A PROPOSED MODEL*

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RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING: A PROPOSED MODEL

Introduction

A developing theme in family research has been a focus on interaction processes and communication relations between family members (Bochner, 1976). The promise of this perspective, however, has not yet been realized because of inadequate conceptualizations and measures. The study of family systems and communication behaviors necessitates a theoretical approach that emphasizes the joint, emergent aspects of interaction. Yet, the bulk of the family interaction studies have continued to use nonsystemic, linear models; models which ignore process and focus on individual behaviors rather than systemic properties.

The pragmatic perspective of communication emphasizes the study of conjoint, ongoing interactional processes (Fisher, 1978). A basic assumption of this perspective is that how people exchange messages influences both the content and the form of their relationship (Duncan, 1968). To not assume this, is to implicitly assert that communication behaviors are either a set of criterion variables or, at best, an intervening set of variables--but definitely not a set of predictors--through which psychological, sociological and/or cultural variables operate. If our discipline is to "come of age", we must minimally assume that communication variables do have explanatory and predictive utility, i.e. make a difference.

A developing body of research referred to as 'relational communication' (Parks, 1977) assumes that all messages have content and relational aspects such that the latter qualifies the former and is, thus, at a logically higher level of analysis (Bateson, 1951, 1958, 1972).

This approach to communicative behaviors attempts to directly describe the relational implications of messages in order to differentiate forms of social relationships--patterns that connect. It's larger theoretical and empirical goal is directed toward discerning redundancies in the ways that people exchange messages (patterns of patterns of connectedness) and with what consequences. Put simply, this approach assumes that how interactions proceed and are organized will at least partially determine the psychological and sociological characteristics of the system and its members.

Developments toward this relational model of communication stem largely from the Palo Alto Research Group (Bateson, 1958; Haley, 1962; Jackson, 1965; Watzlawick et al., 1967; Watzlawick & Weakland, 1977). The concepts of symmetry and complementarity are central constructs in this transactional approach to interpersonal dynamics. Symmetrical interaction is characterized by the exchange of similar relational definitions while complementarity refers to the exchange of maximally dissimilar messages (Watzlawick et al., 1967). A coding scheme for measuring these transactional patterns has been developed (Eriscon & Rogers, 1973; Rogers & Farace, 1975). This scheme has been descriptively and predictively useful in differentiating various family interaction patterns (Rogers, 1972; Millar, 1973; Millar & Rogers, 1976; Parks, 1977; Rogers-Millar & Millar, in press; Courtright et al., in press; Millar et al., in press). These studies have focused on the control dimensions of relationships. As important as this is, to further our knowledge of interpersonal and family systems, other relational dimensions must be incorporated.

It is unfortunate and misleading (and I have played a part in

this) that relational communication and the control defining patterns of symmetry and complementarity have often been defined as synonymous. Complementarity and symmetry are the predominant relational constructs that have been operationalized and researched thus far, but they tap only one area of relational dynamics. (Rogers-Millar, 1979:2)

The purpose of this paper is to begin the dialogue about how other dimensions of social relationships may be "tapped" and incorporated with descriptions of the control dimension.

This paper will review some conceptualizations and measures of possible dimensions and present an exploratory model which attempts to interrelate these concepts in ways that encourage further research and more empirically based theorizing. Specifically, it will be suggested that transactional control and affection dimensions can be used to discriminate between functional and dysfunctional families. Although centered on the family, it is believed that the hypotheses offered will serve as helpful guidelines for developing a more comprehensive theory of interpersonal communication in general.

Proposed Transactional Dimensions

A review of the literature reveals the existence of at least two major relational dimensions which are viewed as important in family and dyadic communication functioning. In one way or another, the dimensions of control and affection are repeatedly mentioned (see Table 1).

Control

In an ongoing message exchange, definitions of self vis-a-vis the other are continually "given-off" (Goffman, 1959). These definitions refer to the participants' "expected acts of deference and demeanor" (Denzin, 1970:71) and to how the two participants are going to, and

should, behave in each other's presence. The control dimension is concerned with the right to direct, constrain, and define the actions of the interpersonal system in the presently experienced spatial-temporal situation. The time relevancy of this dimension is always the present, since the right to define will vary over situations and content areas. Temporally, the control dimension of interpersonal relationships is the most dynamic, for the question of definitional rights must be continually negotiated according to changing internal and external conditions. Developmentally, control is the most basic dimension because if the question of order is not "resolved" in some way, interactions are not likely to continue and affective behaviors cannot be exchanged.

 Insert Table 1 here

Power is another term that is frequently used to refer to definitional rights within an interpersonal system (Sullivan, 1953; Kantor & Lehr, 1975). We prefer to use the term power as the potential to influence or modify the behaviors of another (Rollins & Bahr, 1976). Although both power and control are social, not individual characteristics (i.e., neither can be manifested in isolation), power is a relatively more static characteristic. By that it is meant that power can be "accumulated" within a particular relation by ego's acquisition or achievement of resources (money, education, obligations, territorial ownership, etc.) valued by alter which increase alter's own expectations of deferring to ego's definitional assertions. In this sense, power is consistent with the assumption that the form and, to a lesser degree, the content of a dyad's interaction is predetermined by the resources each brings to the interaction or "possesses" within the situation. But, just

Table 1
Relational Dimensions

Authors	Control (or its analogue)	Affection (or its analogue)	Other Dimensions
Katz et al. (1950, 1951)	Closeness of Supervision	Employee Orientation	
Sullivan (1953)	Power	Tenderness	
Fleishman & Harris (1955)	Initiating Structure	Consideration	
Carter (1954)	Individual Prominence	Sociability	Aiding Attainment
Schutz (1958)	Control	Affection	Inclusion
Borgatta et al. (1958)	Individual Assertiveness	Sociability	
Leary (1957)	Dominance-Submission	Love-Hate	
Borgatta et al. (1960, 1964)	Assertiveness	Likeability & Emotionality	Intelligence-Responsibility
Schaefer (1959)	Control-Autonomy	Love-Hostility	
Schaefer (1961) & Schaefer & Bayley (1963)	Bold-Timid	Friendly-Hostile	
Gibb (1961)	Control vs. Problem Orientation Strategy vs. Spontaneity Superiority vs. Equality	Neutrality vs. Empathy Evaluation vs. Description	Certainty vs. Provisionalism
Foa (1961)	Dominant-Submissive	Warm-Cold	
Becker et al. (1962)	Strictness-Permissiveness	Negative Emotionality- Wrath	
Becker & Krug (1964)	Introversion-Extroversion	Emotional Stability- Instability	
Slater (1962)	Inhibitory Demands and Discipline	Emotional Supportiveness	
Blake & Mouton (1964)	Hierarchy	Concern for People	Concern for Productivity
Lore & McNair (1965)	Dominance, Submission Deference, Agreeableness Inhibition, Exhibition	Affection, Nurturance Detachment, Sociability Hostility, Abasement, Mistrust	Recognition
Brown (1965)	Status	Solidarity	
Carson (1969)	Dominance-Submission	Love-Hate	
Jacob (1975)	Dominance	Affect	Clarity-Accuracy Conflict
Kantor & Lehr (1975)	Power	Affect	Meaning
Miller & Rogers (1976)	Control	Intimacy	Trust

because ego has accumulated the potential for influence does not necessarily mean that that potential will be exercised or accepted in any given message exchange sequence. If it did, the only way relational change could take place is by increasing one's resources relative to the particular other, and this conclusion is inconsistent with the open systems characteristics of emergence and equifinality (Watzlawick, et al., 1967; Buckley, 1967; von Bertalanffy, 1967; Kantor & Lehr, 1975) In sum, power is more of a content issue being indexed by one's resources and the other's perceptions of those resources within a given context. Power dynamics relate to the making of strategic choices within an existing rule structure.

Control, however, is more relationally focused and concerns the transaction rules per se. This distinction between power and control is similar to the one proposed by Baumgartner et al. (1976:224-225) when they state that meta-power or relational control is "control over social relationships and structures," while power is manifested within a given rule structure.

The concept of control refers to what people actually do in any given conversation and to what structure emerges from these messages rather than to what resources each person is perceived by the other as "having" within the situation. Functionally, every message is a control maneuver that attempts to define, redefine or modify the system's presently existing control structure. By combining contiguous control maneuvers, relational transacts can be identified, and by combining sequential transacts, the system's control pattern can be described. In this way, the systemic notions of emergence and non-summativity are implemented so that the system becomes its own best explanation in terms of its dynamic

control patterns. This conception allows for, indeed, focuses on changes generated by the system's own messages and thereby is consistent with the basic assumption of a pragmatic perspective.

An Operationalization of Control: To operationalize our notion of control, the Rogers and Farace (1975) communication coding scheme will be briefly summarized. (The interested reader is encouraged to see the original article for a more detailed description of this procedure.) This scheme focuses on the control implications that exist at the transactional level. The exchange of paired sequential messages over time is the basic unit of analysis.

Following Sluzki and Beavin's (1965) premise that the control definition of a message is rooted in both its grammatical and response form, this classification scheme was designed to code each of these aspects for each message. The grammatical codes utilized are: (1) assertion, (2) question, (3) talk-over, (4) noncomplete, and (5) other. The response codes are: (1) support, (2) nonsupport, (3) extension, (4) answer, (5) instruction, (6) order, (7) disconfirmation, (8) topic change, (9) initiation-termination, (0) other. A three digit code is assigned to each message. The first digit designates the speaker, the second refers to the grammatical form and the third indicates the response mode of the message relative to the previous message. In this manner any communicative exchange can be represented by a series of sequentially ordered numerical codes.¹

The three digit codes are then translated into control maneuvers. These assignments are made on the basis of whether a message is (a) an attempt to assert definitional rights, designated one-up (†) (b) a request or an acceptance of the other's definition of the relationship, designated

as one-down ($\downarrow$) or (c) non-demanding, non-accepting, leveling movement, designated as one-across ($\rightarrow$).

The final step in the coding procedure is to combine the control direction of one message with the control direction of a contiguous message, thereby operationalizing the transactional concepts of symmetry, complementarity, and transition. The similarities or differences between the paired message control maneuvers are used to define basic types of control patterns. Nine transactional or relational units result from the combinations of the three basic control maneuvers.

In a complementary transaction (e.g., $\uparrow\downarrow$) the control directions are different and directionally opposite; the definition of the relationship offered by one interactor is accepted by the other. A symmetrical transaction (e.g., $\uparrow\uparrow$, $\downarrow\downarrow$, or $\rightarrow\rightarrow$), where the control directions are the same, involves one interactor behaving toward the other as the other has behaved toward him; there is a similarity in the control attempts offered by the two individuals. In a transitional transaction, where the paired directions are different but not opposite (e.g., $\rightarrow\downarrow$ or $\uparrow\rightarrow$), one of the interactor's offers or responds with a neutralizing control attempt which minimizes the issue of control. Each of the transactional units provides a measure of the interactors' relationship (a pattern of connectedness) and their sequential grouping provides a "musical score" of the control dynamics (a pattern of patterns of connectedness).

Relational Control Research: Utilizing this measurement procedure, Rogers (1972)² reported that marital pairs exhibiting different levels of strain as indexed by role discrepancy³ were characterized by different communication control patterns. These differences were particularly evident in the short history (married 11 years or less) as

compared to long history dyads (married 12 to 26 years). High role strain couples "tended toward" slightly more symmetrical transacts--particularly neutralizing symmetry--in their conversations than did low discrepant couples.⁴ The frequent occurrence of neutralizing symmetrical ($\leftrightarrow$) transacts⁵ suggests an "avoidance" pattern that periodically erupts into a competitive "status struggle" (Lederer & Jackson, 1968). This suggestion is also supported by the finding that these high strain couples manifested fewer husband one-down transition transacts, which was a type of transitional pattern associated with more conversational "harmony" and "smoothness" of flow. Further, high strain couples' expressed (a) fewer support statements for each other, (b) fewer unsuccessful talk-overs and (c) more one-up wife control maneuvers than their low strain counterparts.

Comparisons between the high and low role strain couples' self-reports about various inter-spousal behaviors yielded the following results: low discrepant dyads reported (a) spending more time together, (b) talking more with one another, and (c) talking about more topics (particularly more personal topics) than high strain couples. Lastly, low discrepant dyads reported being more satisfied with both their communication and marital relations.

Millar (1973) used the rigid-flexible and stable-unstable continua of the control dimension as independent variables in his analysis of the marital pairs, and reported the following main effects:⁶ couples classified as rigid had (a) more transitory transactions in their discussions, (b) a higher frequency of husband one-down type of transitory exchange, and (c) more neutralized symmetrical transacts than did the flexible couples. Flexible dyads, on the other hand, had a larger proportion of (d) complementary transactions, (e) transitory

transacts with the husband one-up, and (f) competitive and (g) submissive symmetrical configurations in their discussions than did the rigid couples.

Marital pairs classified as stable reported more satisfaction with their interspousal communication and discussed more topics more frequently than did the unstable partners. Stable couples seemed to have more "lively" conversations than the unstable pairs as they exchanged more messages in comparable periods of time. Further, stable partners had more transitory and fewer complementary transacts in their discussions than the unstable dyads.

Those initial research efforts were primarily concerned with the viability of the coding procedures and their usefulness in describing control patterns. A more recent set of studies has focused on differences associated with different control structures. The first of these studies (Rogers-Millar & Millar, in press) proposed and evidenced a conceptual distinction between domineeringness and dominance. The former is indexed by the proportion of one-up messages transmitted by an individual so that the higher this proportion, the more domineering the individual. Dominance, on the other hand, is based on the number of times an individual's one-up statements are followed by a one-down response from the other. Whereas domineeringness refers to attempts to define only, dominance refers to these attempts and their acceptance by the other. The former concept, therefore, is an individual variable while the latter is a systemic-state.

Wife domineeringness was found to be associated with lower levels of marital and communication satisfaction and higher levels of role strain. Husband dominance was associated with higher levels of satis-

faction and lower levels of role strain. A second study (Courtright, et al., in press) based on a larger sample of husband-wife couples, was supportive of the conceptions and findings of the first study. Further, domineeringness was found to be inversely related to the other's level of understanding and to transactional rigidity.

The inverse relationship between domineeringness and understanding was supported in a third study (Millar, et al., in press). In this analysis it was also found that the less equivalency in the dominance pattern, the less each spouse understood the other. Put another way, the more rigid the couple's control structure (the more frequently one person compared to the other defines the relational pattern) the less each person understands the other. This finding apparently evidences the functionality of reciprocal complementary patterns (Bateson, 1949) and the desirability of parallel long-term relationships (Lederer & Jackson, 1968).

A fourth study (Rogers-Millar, et al., 1979) attempted to increase the precision with which control patterns can be described by introducing a measure of message intensity. This measure clearly depicts the homeostatic nature of conversations and indicates that the degree of rigidity and stability characterizing a couple's control patterns are strongly interrelated with intensity values and movements.

Affection

Affection refers to the amount of emotional closeness which exists within a relational system. It concerns the amount of subjectively perceived caring the individuals have for and exchange with each other. Affection focuses on the system's "attachments" (McCall and Simmons, 1966:172), and concerns the degree to which each person a) uses

the other as a source of self-confirmation and b) the salience of the subjective evaluation of self's-other's-self. Affection is not based in the content of the relationship (Sammel, 1959:126-27) but lies in the degree and amount of exclusivity with which each person shares parts of self with a particular other and the evaluation of this reciprocal dependency generated through this exclusive sharing.

The time relevancy of this transactional dimension of relationships is primarily the past because the perceived "closeness" and exclusive sharing is based on what the system has done. This obviously carries implications and obligations about what will be and should be done, but these implications and obligations stem from past sharings and not presently experienced "feelings." For example, just because A has sex with B does not necessarily mean that A and B are emotionally close or "attached" or exclusively share that part of themselves with the other. Granted, A does require B, at least some B to perform this behavior, but the performance is more a matter of how the system will define their relationship and interlock their behaviors in the presently experienced situation. The performance or manifestation of this behavior then, is more readily explained with the control dimension than with notions of affection.

However, it seems unlikely that a condition of perceived caring and feelings of exclusivity would emerge without exchanging behaviors that indicate an attachment with each other. To state this point more poetically, one can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving. We believe that this confusion of time relevancies between the control and affection dimensions and the equating of affective content with relational degrees of affection (similar to the equating of domi-

neering behavior with relational dominance) has led to much of the conceptual fuzziness surrounding attempts to study love, intimacy or affection.

The measurement of a dyad's affection pattern, given its heavy phenomenological and subjective basis, presents some methodological problems to say the least. But some operations and measurements must be attempted since this dimension is crucial in differentiating interpersonal from role bound interactions. The above reasoning suggests that both behaviors and perceptions need to be indexed in order to distinguish between dyads' levels of affection. The operational questions, then, become what communicative behaviors are exchanged that can be reasonably assumed to index a dyad's level of emotional closeness and how can the perceptual patterns about these behaviors be fruitfully described? Villard's (1976) work on affection exchange is suggested as one means of indexing communicative behaviors through which affection emerges and is maintained, and Laing's et al. (1966) Interpersonal Perception Model is suggested as a way of profiling dyadic perceptual patterns.

Operationalization of Affection Exchange: Villard and Whipple (1976), in analyzing affection exchange between husbands and wives, hypothesized two principal behavioral forms by which degrees of caring might be indexed. Intimate forms of exchange refer to definitions of "who they are" expressed through the communicative behaviors of self-disclosure, physical touch, facial affect displays, verbal aggression (e.g. teasing) and sexuality. Economic forms refer to sharing "what they have" through gift giving, the granting of access rights (access to personal property and possessions), by doing favors and through

giving or loaning money. In the former case, affection is exchanged by sharing more personal (intimate) aspects of self-other definitions, and in the latter, through the sharing of more impersonal (economic) time and energy resources.

Assuming that these two ways of showing affection are fundamentally distinct, nonreciprocal exchange patterns were hypothesized to be a source of conflict and/or frustration. In marriages where one spouse primarily prefers the intimate forms of affection exchange and the other has a tendency to use economic forms, it was suggested that one or both will feel "unappreciated" or "unloved" by virtue of not having received the kind of affectionate behavior preferred. This hypothesis was based on the social exchange premises that reciprocation "in kind" is an implicit social norm (Homans, 1961; Gouldner, 1960; Levinger, 1965), and that the greater the degree of similarity of the exchanged resources, the greater the satisfaction derived from the exchange (Turner, *et al.*, 1971; Foa and Foa, 1972). Further, this hypothesis seems consistent with Laing's (1966, 1967, 1972) notion that much of human behavior is oriented toward being the desired-other for the other so that each can be their own desired-self.

Affection Exchange Findings: To test this affection exchange conceptualization, Villard (1976) interviewed 120 marital couples divided equally into three groups: 40 couples who were experiencing some difficulty in their marriage and were being seen in a private or social service agency, 40 couples who had a child who was having either emotional, behavioral or adjustment problems and a random sample of 40 couples who reported neither marital difficulties nor difficulties with their children. The following are several of the major findings.

Spouses' with more similar affection exchange behaviors, were more likely to report a) higher levels of perceived equity and b) higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Accuracy in predicting (i.e. understanding) how one's spouse responded to each affection exchange item did not appear to raise the levels of equity or satisfactions reported by husbands and wives. It was hypothesized, for example, that knowing that one's spouse used economic behaviors to show affection, even if oneself tended toward intimate affection usage, would enable one to evaluate more positively the affection exchange offerings of one's spouse. This, however, does not appear to be the case. People who were very accurate at predicting how their spouse would respond to these items, still reported low equity and low marital satisfaction if the couple was dissimilar in their affection behaviors. In Laing's terms, even though one may understand the other, if certain behaviors are not manifested each cannot be the desired-self for the other and thus are dissatisfied with the relationship.

Husbands and wives were not found to differ in their usage of economic forms of affection exchange. Wives, however, were found to use more intimate forms (e.g. self-disclosure, physical touch, facial affect displays, etc.) than husbands. When coupled with the first result, these findings suggest that many marriages may be predisposed to unhappiness, unfulfillment, conflict and/or divorce because of socialized differences between men and women in how they share "who they are" and how they manifest "affection". In addition, these findings suggest that the cognitive understanding of another is neither necessary nor sufficient for satisfactory relationships, but that behavioral change may be a sufficient condition for improving one's own satisfaction.

Couples with children who were being seen for emotional, behavioral or adjustment problems were found to (a) have the lowest overall affection scores (i.e., combining both economic and intimate forms) and (b) report the lowest level of intimate affection usage. This tends to support previous research which has described the "symptomatic child's" portrayal of his parents' marital relationship as distant, non-intimate, and rejecting (Bell and Vogel, 1960; Spiegel, 1968; Wienstein, 1965; Fisher, 1967; Duhamel and Jarmon, 1971, Odom et al., 1971). Further, assuming that the parents' interaction patterns serve as a model for the child's behavior, this finding suggests how problems of emotional closeness are perpetuated from generation to generation.

Levels of Interpersonal Perception: Laing et al. (1966) assume that much of human behavior is predominately concerned with maintaining and developing relations with others. Given that we know who we are only in relation to particular others within a situation, much of our behavior is aimed at being the desired-other for the other and having the other confirm our own desired-self. Hence, "the other I am for the other is a constant concern of us all" (Laing et al., 1966: 6).

These authors suggest that there are at least three perceptual levels in interpersonal interactions which are simultaneously and continually occurring: (1) direct perspective--ego's view of object X; (2) meta-perspective--ego's view of alter's view of object X; and (3) meta-meta-perspective--ego's view of alter's view of ego's view of object X. These three different perceptual levels can be compared for any given pair of interactors. A comparison of each person's direct perspectives describes whether or not the pair agree or disagree (A-D) on their respective views of X. Comparing ego's meta-perspective with alter's direct

perspective on any given X yields the degree of understanding-misunderstanding (U-M) ego has for alter and vice versa. Thirdly, by comparing ego's meta-meta-perspective with alter's meta-perspective it can be determined whether or not each realizes that he/she is being understood or misunderstood by the other. This third comparison indexes the degree of realization or failure to realize understanding (R-F).⁷

These three comparisons can be combined to form a static profile of the dyad's levels of understanding on any given issue. For instance, using Laing's et al. codes, the profile 'F M A U R' indicates that the couple agrees (A), but one person misunderstands the other (M) and fails to realize that he is being understood (F); the other person, however, understands (U) and realizes that she is being misunderstood (R).

Based on a small sample of "disturbed" (sought marital counseling) and "nondisturbed" (have not used marital counseling) couples, Laing et al. reported several differences in the couples' perceptual profiles. As compared to the "disturbed" couples, the "nondisturbed" husbands and wives displayed significantly (a) more agreements across topics, (b) fewer disagreements without misunderstanding, (c) more agreements with understanding, (d) fewer incorrectly perceived misunderstandings, and (e) fewer incorrectly perceived understandings.

In general, agreeing with and understanding the other went together. Further, there appeared to be a "strain toward agreement" in that parties tended to predict agreement even when, in fact, they disagreed. Disagreements, then, are frequently not perceived accurately and this was more often observed in the "disturbed" than the "nondisturbed" couples.

A communication-state is defined as an event that occurs "when two or more systems capable of processing symbolic information and assigning meaning realize that they are understood and understand each other, i.e., realize they have shared meaning" (Millar & Millar, 1976: 12). These occurrences of mutual understanding are bound to particular situations and content areas and are not dependent on agreement. Operationally, such a state of shared meaning is indexed by comparing Laing's et al. three perceptual levels. The two profiles where both parties realize they are understood and understand the other--R U A U R and R U D U R--are the only ones that profile communication-states.

The concern with these perceived levels of understanding is to try and describe what transactional patterns appear to covary with mutual understandings and mutual realizations of being understood. Put another way, the concern with these levels is an exploratory attempt to describe how various control patterns and affection exchange patterns effect and are effected by the frequency with which a couple reaches communication-states.

Schemata

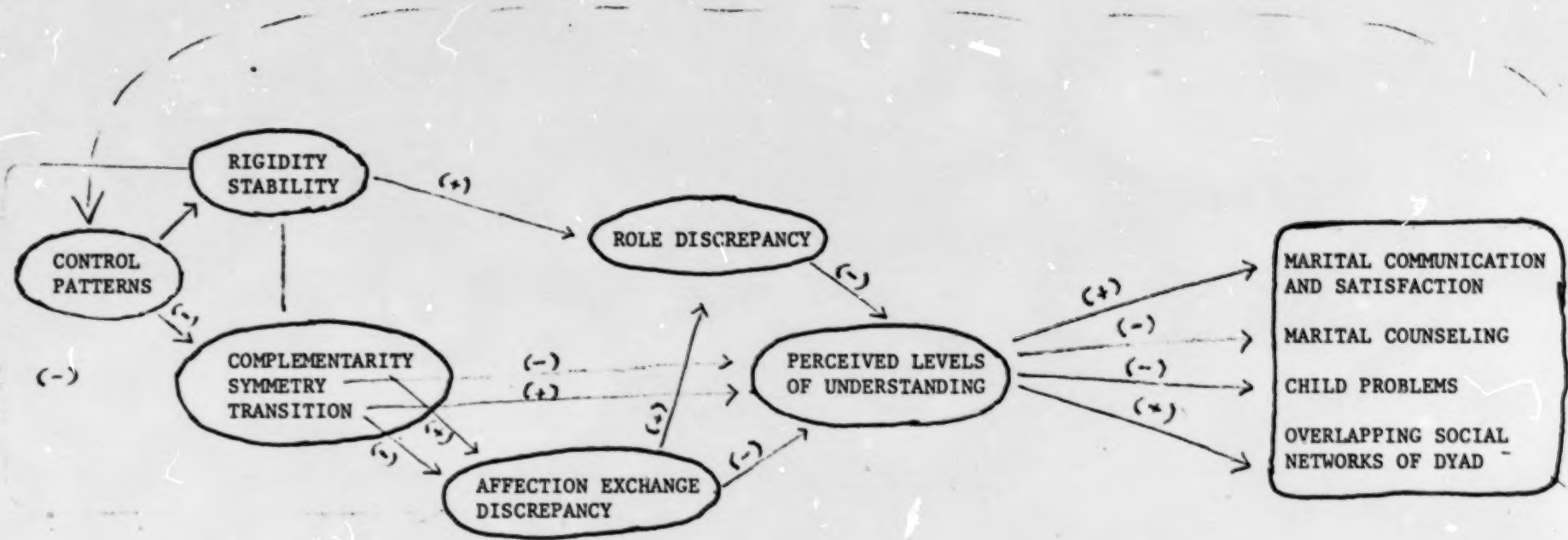
The proposed transactional dimensions are combined in Figure 1 and represent the primary predictor variables of the model. The linkages between the variables are pre-theoretic and should be viewed as guidelines for research rather than as theoretical hypotheses to be tested. The model, then, is exploratory but consistent with existent research, and focuses our attention on what we believe are crucial questions to be investigated in order to establish a behavior based theory of family communication. The basic questions needing investiga-

tion are: (1) what are the independent effects of the predictors on the criterion variables; (2) what are the size and the directions of the paths connecting the predictors; (3) what are the interactive effects of these predictors on the criterion variables (controlling on various socio-demographic variables such as education, income level, social class, race, ethnicity, age, length of marriage, number of children, etc.); and (4) what are the recursive effects of the criterion on the predictor variables. (The model is conceived of as a cybernetic one but is displayed in path form in order to emphasize the descriptive and predictive centrality of the transactional dimensions.) Extensive investigation of these questions will significantly aid the establishment of a more rigorous communication theory of family functioning in particular, and of interpersonal relations in general.

Figure 1 about here

The model outlines several of the major linkages to be investigated. For illustrative purposes, a few of these paths will be described. One of the most widely espoused propositions in the clinical literature on family dynamics is that rigid interaction patterns are positively associated with various individual disturbances and pathologies (Jackson, 1959; Haley, 1964; Sluzki and Beavin, 1965; Murrel and Stachowiak, 1965; Beels and Farber, 1969). The hypothesized chain of interconnections in the model is as follows: the greater the degree of transactional rigidity, the greater degree of role discrepancy, and the less frequent mutual realizations of understanding--the less marital satisfaction and the more likely the couple will have "problematic" children.

Figure 1. Suggested Model of Relational Communication and Family Functioning



Secondly, a stability-instability continuum of interaction patterns is often confused in the literature with the rigidity-flexibility dimension. Millar (1973) successfully differentiated the two and reported that they are independent dimensions by which transactional control patterns can be described. A second chain of hypotheses would be: the greater the degree of instability, the greater the affection exchange discrepancy, the greater the role discrepancy, and the less frequent realized mutual understandings--the more likely the couple is to be in counseling and the more likely they are to have a "problematic" child.

Turning to transaction types, the previously cited research suggests that symmetry is associated with discord and dissatisfaction while transitory forms are associated with relative harmony and satisfaction. Thus, a third chain of hypotheses would be the following: the greater the amount of symmetrical transacts observed in the couple's conversation, the greater the affection exchange discrepancy, the higher the role discrepancy, and the less the number of realized mutual understandings--the more likely the couple is to be in counseling and have non-overlapping social networks.

Fourth, the greater the discrepancy in the types of affection exchange manifested and desired, the higher the couple's role discrepancy, and the less frequently the dyad mutually realizes understanding--the less satisfied they will be with their marriage and the more likely they are to be in counseling.

Quite obviously, several univariate hypotheses are stated in the above predictions: for instance, (a) the more realized mutual understandings, the more marital satisfaction; (b) the higher the role discrepancy, the more likely the couple is to be in counseling; (c) the greater the

affection exchange discrepancy, the greater the role strain; (d) the greater the affection exchange discrepancy, the less frequent realized mutual understandings will be observed; and (e) the greater the instability in the couple's communication pattern, the more likely they are to have a "problematic" child. Rather than list a large number of such univariate hypotheses, it is hoped that the above will serve to illustrate the types of questions encouraged for investigation. These questions are primarily pre-theoretical but need to be answered in order to develop a more comprehensive communication theory of interpersonal relations, as well as useful diagnostic tools for relational analyses and counseling.

Conclusion

This paper sought to briefly summarize and interrelate separate, earlier attempts at describing marital transactional patterns. The import of the studies cited and the hypotheses suggested was well expressed by Haley (1962) when he emphasized that functions and effects of various behavioral patterns within and across families will not be adequately studied unless more descriptive schemes can be developed. The development of such schemes requires that a shift be made away from an over-emphasis on the individual, to an emphasis on the systematic patterns observed in the family members' behaviors. "The crucial difference between families would seem to reside in the sorts of transactions which take place between family members; the study of differences becomes a classification of communication patterns in the family" (emphasis our own, Haley, 1962: 262).

Previous studies have resulted in some encouraging findings. These findings are limited, however, given that they were exploratory and

concentrated on separate dimensions of long-term relationships. The authors believe that the guidelines presented for interrelating and extending these previous findings will significantly increase our understanding of how interpersonal and family systems function and with what consequences. Further, it is hoped that the suggested hypotheses will stimulate others to investigate and theorize about the utility of the conceptualizations and measures proposed.

Footnotes

¹In the initial study of 65 dyads utilizing this three digit code, reliability figures ranged from .68 to 1.00. The average reliability across all comparisons was .86 (Ericson and Rogers, 1973). In a second study of 112 dyads, the intercoder reliabilities ranged from .79 to 1.00, with average of .89. The coding provides a relatively simple, objective, and reliable measure of the control defining aspects of relationships.

²The couples were randomly selected from a telephone listing of a midwest metropolitan and suburban area. They all had at least one child under 12 years of age. The interactional data base was tape-recorded conversations of each pair discussing four topics--two concerning family situations, and two concerning family behavior in emergency situations. Self-report data was also obtained from each husband and wife separately.

³Role discrepancy refers to the degree of inequity perceived to be present in the dyadic system and was measured by comparing each spouse's statement about who does do and who should do a variety of tasks. The greater the discrepancy between husband's and wife's descriptions of who "should" and who "does," the greater the role strain or discrepancy. Thus role discrepancy is a relatively more static system state that would be classified as a "bring to" variable than an immediately emerging one.

⁴No variation in complementary exchanges was noted by discrepancy level.

⁵One-across messages seem to have multiple relational functions. In the one-down, one-across exchange, the one-across message appears to be a low level assertion of relational definition. In the one-up, one-across transact, it appears to function as an attempt to curb the assertion of control. Instead of submitting to or directly challenging the assertion, a less demanding, but not accepting, response is transmitted. With neutralized symmetry, one-across messages seem to indicate an avoidance of definitional rights.

⁶Rigidity refers to a lack of alternation in the transactional pattern and stability refers to the predictability of the system's own pattern. Scores on these two variables were found to be independent ($r = .02$) and differentiated the couples on several indices.

⁷It is the second level of comparison that Villard's (1976) "accuracy" finding refers to. From his data, it would appear that understanding another does not significantly alter one's own satisfaction. However, without the third level comparison on realization of understanding, this result is theoretically tenuous at best. From a diagnostic point of view, unless there is a mutual realization of being understood, the development and implementation of behavioral change within the counseling dyad to increase their marital satisfaction would appear to be futile given that neither partner would "know" that the other "knew" where he/she was coming from. The issue of how much difference in a person's overall relational evaluation can be accounted for by differences in abilities to reach communication-states and the frequency with which they are reached on what topics of interpersonal concern, needs to be investigated by the scholar and practitioner alike.

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